

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

NYDIA M. VELAZQUEZ

12TH DISTRICT, NEW YORK

June 1, 2011

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CHILDREN'S CAUCUS

The Honorable Michael R. Bloomberg
Mayor of New York City
City Hall
New York, N.Y. 10007

Dear Mayor Bloomberg:

This letter follows up on April 5, 2010 correspondence regarding the issue of tourist helicopters. Relentless helicopter noise is a serious quality of life issue for New Yorkers on both sides of the East River. Complaints about this issue continue arising in communities within New York's 12th District, such as Lower Manhattan, Brooklyn Heights and Red Hook, Brooklyn. With tourist season in full swing, these flights are occurring more regularly, prompting an even higher level of complaints. Today, I am requesting that you consider banning tourist helicopter traffic over New York City altogether.

Previously, I joined with colleagues in city and state government to ask for a comprehensive reexamination of the regulation and enforcement of tourist helicopter traffic in the city. However, all of us now agree that incremental steps will not address the core problem.

Following the closure of the West 30th Street Heliport, there has been a concentration of all NYC tourist helicopter traffic at one facility: the Downtown Manhattan Heliport on the East River. Even with mitigation measures taken by the New York City Economic Development Corporation (EDC), the impact on the surrounding area has been intense.

This is not just an in-flight problem. As the river is narrow and water amplifies the propellers' sound, Brooklyn residents are impacted by helicopters as they warm up before take off. Each machine must warm up for a half hour on the ground — at full throttle — before it can safely take off. The blades make a strong reverberation that is felt across the river, creating an unrelenting annoyance for residents.

The flight patterns also create noise issues for New Yorkers. The route from this heliport follows low over Buttermilk Channel between Governor's Island and Brooklyn Heights/Cobble Hill/Red Hook, Brooklyn. The FAA in fact discourages helicopters from flying any higher, compounding the problem for residents living near this very narrow channel.

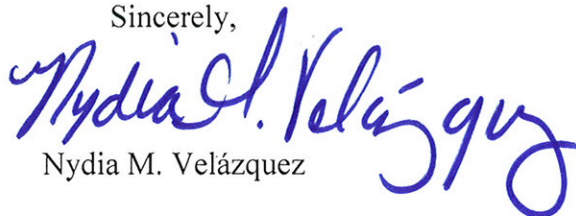
Beyond noise pollution, these flights present a significant safety risk both in the air and on the ground. With all tourist helicopters now landing and taking off from the same location, there are serious issues of flight congestion. Moreover, the FAA has acknowledged that they only regulate flights above 1,500 feet, leaving tourist helicopters operating without effective government regulation. Given the helicopter collision that occurred in August of 2009, there is good reason to be concerned about flight safety.

All concerned parties have worked to find compromise, but the solutions to date have not addressed the underlying problem – namely, that helicopter tours are a bad fit in such a densely populated urban area. The city's tourism would not suffer if tourist helicopter rides were suspended. In fact, the quality of life and neighborhood tourist destinations on the ground would improve. Tourists can find equally spectacular views of the city skyline at Brooklyn Bridge Park or the Brooklyn Heights Promenade and other world-famous destinations, without noise that disrupts the community.

Addressing this issue is a question of safety for helicopter users and residents on the ground. The largely unregulated flights that disturb the peace in Manhattan and Brooklyn neighborhoods must stop. I believe this remains the responsibility of the City and ask you to reinstate the ban on tourist helicopter traffic.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Nydia M. Velázquez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nydia" and last name "Velázquez" clearly legible. The signature is positioned above the printed name.

Nydia M. Velázquez